

## The Courage to Focus on Fundamentals by James Clear

I was in the gym one day, training like usual, when my coach made an important observation. It didn't take me long to see how this discovery applied to other areas of my life as well.

Here's what happened.

We looked across the gym and saw someone performing lateral raises with dumbbells while standing on a Bosu ball. (This is an exercise that focuses on smaller muscles in the shoulder and doesn't do much for the rest of the body.)

My coach watched for a moment and then said, "Imagine how good you have to be for that exercise to be the thing that gets you to the next level."

His point was that this person was focusing on an exercise that improved a few, tiny muscles in their body while ignoring the more important foundational movements. Even an Olympic athlete who had mastered the basic movements (squats, bench press, etc.) could not honestly look in the mirror and say, "You know what's holding me back? I'm not doing enough lateral raises."

In other words, the problem is that too many people waste time on the details before mastering the fundamentals. And I'd say the same in true outside of the gym as well.

### The Courage to Master the Fundamentals

Everybody has the same basic body and needs, and we have to have the courage to train the fundamentals, the basics, at least 80% of the time. Sure, add some spice in there now and again, but focus on the basics.

— Dan John

Committing to the basics and mastering the fundamentals can be hard. And I get it. I've struggled to fall in love with boredom and focus on the basics many times.

For example, as an entrepreneur it is very easy for me to spend my days working on the details. Should I make a small tweak to my website design? Should I answer these 50 emails? Should I switch my payment processor so that I can save an extra 2 percent on fees?

All of these things have a place, but that place should not be at the top of my to-do list. Instead, my time would be better spent focusing on the fundamentals. For example, writing two really good articles each week.

## Avoid the "Edge Cases"

In the words of my friend, Corbett Barr, people waste too much time debating edge cases. Edge cases are the what-ifs, the could-bes, the minor details — the things that might make a 2 percent difference, but mostly distract you from the real work that would make 80 percent of the difference.

- \* If you're considering a new diet, but you're worried that you might not be able to stick with it when you go out with your friends on Thursday nights, then you're worrying about an edge case. Thursday night isn't going to make or break you. It's the work you put in during the other 20 meals of the week that matters.

- \* If you're starting a business and you're debating over business cards or shipping methods or a thousand other things that could delay you from finding your first paying customer, then you're stuck on the edge cases. You can optimize later. Meanwhile, delaying this decision is bringing in exactly zero dollars.

- \* If you're trying to "get all of your ducks in a row" or figure out "the right way to do this" then you're probably giving yourself an excuse to avoid the hard decisions. Research is only useful until it becomes a form of procrastination. In most cases, you'll discover better answers by doing than by researching.

The greatest skill in any endeavor is doing the work. And for that reason, most people don't need more time, more money, or better strategies. They just need to do the real work and master the basics.

## Don't Fear the Fundamentals

Most people avoid the fundamentals because they don't have the guts to become great at them. When you eliminate everything that is unnecessary, there are no details to hide behind. You're left with just the basics and whether or not you have mastered them.

It's easier to tell people that you're "working on a new strategy" or you're "doing more research." It's hard to say, "I'm focusing on the basics, but I haven't made much progress yet."

Do you have the courage to simplify and become the best at the basics? Stop wasting time on the details that make the last 10% of difference.

What good is a lateral raise if you can't do a proper press? What good is a fancy business logo if you haven't found your first paying customer? What good is a better guitar if you haven't built the habit of practicing each day?

Without the fundamentals, the details are useless.